

VZCZCXRO8795
PP RUEHQU
DE RUEHPU #0431/01 1141906
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 241906Z APR 09
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9870
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000431

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/EX, WHA/CAR, S/CRS, DS/IP/WHA, AND INR/IAA
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS TO USOAS, USAID/LAC
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/23/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM ASEC HA

SUBJECT: HAITI ELECTIONS: CANDIDATES POSTURE AS RESULTS
TRICKLE IN

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 419

Classified By: Amb. Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary. Haiti's April 19 partial senate elections were generally well-organized. Isolated incidents of violence, intimidation and theft of voting materials, which led to cancellation of the vote in one department and demands to annul the vote in parts of another were reported. Voter turnout was low across the country, especially in the capital, and will probably not exceed 10 percent. The election day prohibition of public transportation, confusion as to where citizens were to vote, and fear in the face of the Fanmis Lavalas boycott were the major factors that kept many voters at home. Many candidates have already claimed victory, although official results will not be released until April 27. Given the multiplicity of candidates, runoff elections -- to be held June 7 -- are a near certainty in a number of Departments. Some Senators promise to refuse to seat newly elected colleagues due to low voter turnout and the exclusion of Fanmi Lavalas candidates, which, if carried out, could lead to a political showdown. End summary.

Election Organization: Fairly Smooth

¶2. (SBU) The Embassy's twenty-nine election observers reported that organization and management of the voting process in the field was generally favorable. On voting day, most polling stations opened on time; political party poll-watchers were usually present; eligible voter lists were posted at the great majority of voting centers; and security personnel were on-site at most centers.

¶3. (U) Elections took place in relative calm, although several incidents of violence, ballot-stuffing and ballot-stealing were reported in the Center and Artibonite Departments. Haitian National Police authorities told the press on April 23 that eighty-six people had been arrested for electoral fraud, possession of arms, or public disorder. Only three arrests out of this total were made in the Center Department, where the CEP suspended elections for the entire department after an electoral worker was shot in Mirebalais and unknown perpetrators stole ballot boxes in some voting centers (reftel).

¶4. (U) MINUSTAH authorities in an April 21 press statement spoke favorably of the election's organization and congratulated Haitians on exercising their civil liberties. MINUSTAH called for the apprehension and prosecution of those involved in election day violence. A MINUSTAH spokeswoman on April 23 stated that April 19 had been the least violent election day in Haiti for a long time.

Low Voter Turn-Out: The Threat of Violence or No Transport?

¶15. (U) Haitians did not turn out to vote in large numbers for Senate elections. Initial indications are that national turnout was ten percent or less, and even lower in the West Department, which includes the capital. Embassy concurs with press commentary and the observation of some Senators that the low turn-out resulted from the election day prohibition of public transportation, delays and confusion surrounding the final voting center list and associated lists of voters, as well as thinly-veiled intimidation by the election boycott campaign of Fanmis Lavalas. The latter included anonymous leaflets left in many districts, especially in the capital, warning people that persons trying to vote would meet with violence.

¶16. (C) Former Senator and current West Department Senate Candidate Evelyn Cheron of the Movement to Establish Democracy in Haiti/MIDH, a small party whose members are former Fanmi Lavalas partisans, thought the intimidation factor was paramount. She told Poloffs on April 23 that the threat of violence kept most voters in the Port-au-Prince area from going to the polls. Cheron, whose support base includes Cite Soleil, said residents were threatened with harm if they voted. She called rival Lespwa candidate (and also a former Lavalas partisan) Joel Joseph John "unscrupulous" and said he, too, was responsible for such threats. MINUSTAH argued that the lack of transportation was the primary reason for the low turnout. Prime Minister Michelle Pierre-Louis said she, too, believed low voter turnout was due to the lack of transportation. (Comment: Port-au-Prince residents rarely vote higher than 4-6 percent

PORT AU PR 00000431 002 OF 002

in local elections. End comment)

¶17. (SBU) Pierre-Louis Opont, CEP Director General, told Poloff April 23 that the CEP would release final results April 27. He defended the CEP's decision to prohibit public transport on election day, arguing that the CEP feared gangs and other miscreants would follow through on threats to disrupt voting. Prohibiting public transport allowed security forces to better monitor the movement of people and vehicles and deter violence. If Port-au-Prince had "exploded" in violence, it would have been nearly impossible to secure the integrity of the voting process, even in areas far removed from the capital. While Opont firmly defended that decision, he told Poloff that the CEP plans to permit public transportation for the June 7 run-off elections. He wondered what the critics would then say if "violence breaks out in Port-au-Prince."

Several Candidates Declare Victory as Tabulation Continues

¶18. (C) Although official results are not yet available, a number of candidates have already declared victory, a time-honored Haitian tactic designed to mobilize supporters and intimidate opponents and elections authorities, and set the stage for claims of fraud if results don't go the candidate's way. Lavalas militant turned Lespwa candidate, Joel Joseph John (West), was one of the first to do so. (Note: West Candidate Evelyn Cheron told Poloffs April 23 that a "friend" at the Voting Tabulation Center told her she was ahead of John -- a subtle hint that if she does not win, fraud was involved. End note)

¶19. (SBU) In Aquin (South), partisans of Marie Danielle Comeau (Konba) brandished sticks, threw rocks, and stopped traffic April 21, according to press reports, as they proclaimed their candidate victorious. Former Deputy Franky Exeus (now Lespwa, but also a former Lavalasian) claimed victory in the same department, telling Poloff April 21 that voting in the South was largely free from irregularities. These candidates, along with a half-dozen others who have declared themselves victorious or at least through to the second

round, seem to be counting on their positive message to keep their supporters mobilized during the 6-week period between the two rounds of voting.

¶10. (C) As of 0800 local time April 24, the Voter Tabulation Center had received and processed 96 percent of the polling place vote tallies (procès verbaux), according to OAS election specialist Roly Davila. There were unspecified inconsistencies in the tabulation of vote tallies for the Artibonite Department, but Davila provided no details. He said the CEP would make the final decision regarding the results in the Artibonite by COB April 24.

Senators threaten to Block Recognition of Results

¶11. (SBU) In a sign of possible future trouble, two Senators recently signaled that they are canvassing colleagues to block the recognition of the election results in the Senate. Senator Evaliere Beauplan (PONT, Northwest) threatened April 22 to block the seating of the Senators who emerge victorious in the elections, saying turnout was so low ''there were no elections April 19,'' and calling the April 19 voting a ''masquerade.'' Senator Fritz Carlos Lebon (Union, South) made similar comments, citing the CEP's ''poor'' handling of the elections and the decision to prohibit public transportation as diminishing the legitimacy of the results. Senators Rudy Heriveaux (Fanmi Lavalas, West) and Yvon Buissereth (Fanmi Lavalas, South) have already threatened to use the Senate's internal rules to block the accession of new Senators in order to protest their party's exclusion from the April 19 balloting. Lavalas supporters claim that the rules -- combined with the twelve vacant seats in the Senate -- permit any coalition of three Senators to prevent the election results from being recognized.

SANDERSON